

May 1983

\$1.50

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ON THE TRAIL OF THE

FAR up the Likouala-aux-herbes River in a Congolese jungle in November 1981, two dugouts knifed through the water. In the bow of the lead craft sat U.S. biologist Roy Mackal. Behind him rode a retinue of Pygmies and scientists. There were rumors that a great secret lay hidden here, a creature long believed extinct. Mackal, a cryptozoologist — seeker of hidden animals — who had spent years studying the Loch Ness phenomenon as well as monster sightings in Canadian lakes, was hot on its trail.

As the party rounded a bend, Mackal raised his eyes to look at a small savanna ahead of them. Suddenly, he recalls, "there was the tremendous sound of a great creature submerging. It produced a wave that broke over our dugout. And the Pygmies shouted, '*Mokele-mbembe! Mokele-mbembe!*' "

Terror-stricken, they refused to continue paddling. But Mackal ordered them on, threatening them with loss of pay if they refused. Reluctantly, they picked up their paddles and headed to the spot where the animal had disappeared. Nothing was to be seen.

While the exact meaning of *mokele-mbembe* is unknown, the Pygmies use the term to describe a reddish-brown reptile the size of a hippopotamus, with a long tail and neck, and a snakelike head. It carries

itself on four squat legs that leave round, three-clawed tracks the size of frying pans. They tell stories of it capsizing canoes with its great, flailing tail, then killing the occupants. Mackal believes the animal may be a dinosaur. It is a fantastic claim, bordering on the edge of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* — but that is exactly what Mackal considers this area of the Congo to be.

"Look at it!" he says, unrolling a map in his university office. "This part of the world hasn't changed for 60 million years. No glaciation, no great temperature changes, no mountain ranges evolving. There are plants here from the Cretaceous period. If a dinosaur were alive today, *this* is where it would be."

Sauropod? Reports of giant creatures that live in the rivers and swamps have circulated among the Pygmies for centuries. In his journal from a trip to the Congo in 1776, Lievain Bonaventure Proyard, a French missionary, wrote of seeing large, round, three-clawed tracks. His report was corroborated by Alfred Aloysius Smith, popularly known as Trader Horn, in the late 1800s. Similar reports continued off and on for decades. Then in 1976, while studying crocodiles in Gabon, biologist Jim Powell heard descriptions of a beast like the *mokele-mbembe*. He contacted Mackal and the two men agreed to explore the

"MAYBE MONSTERS"

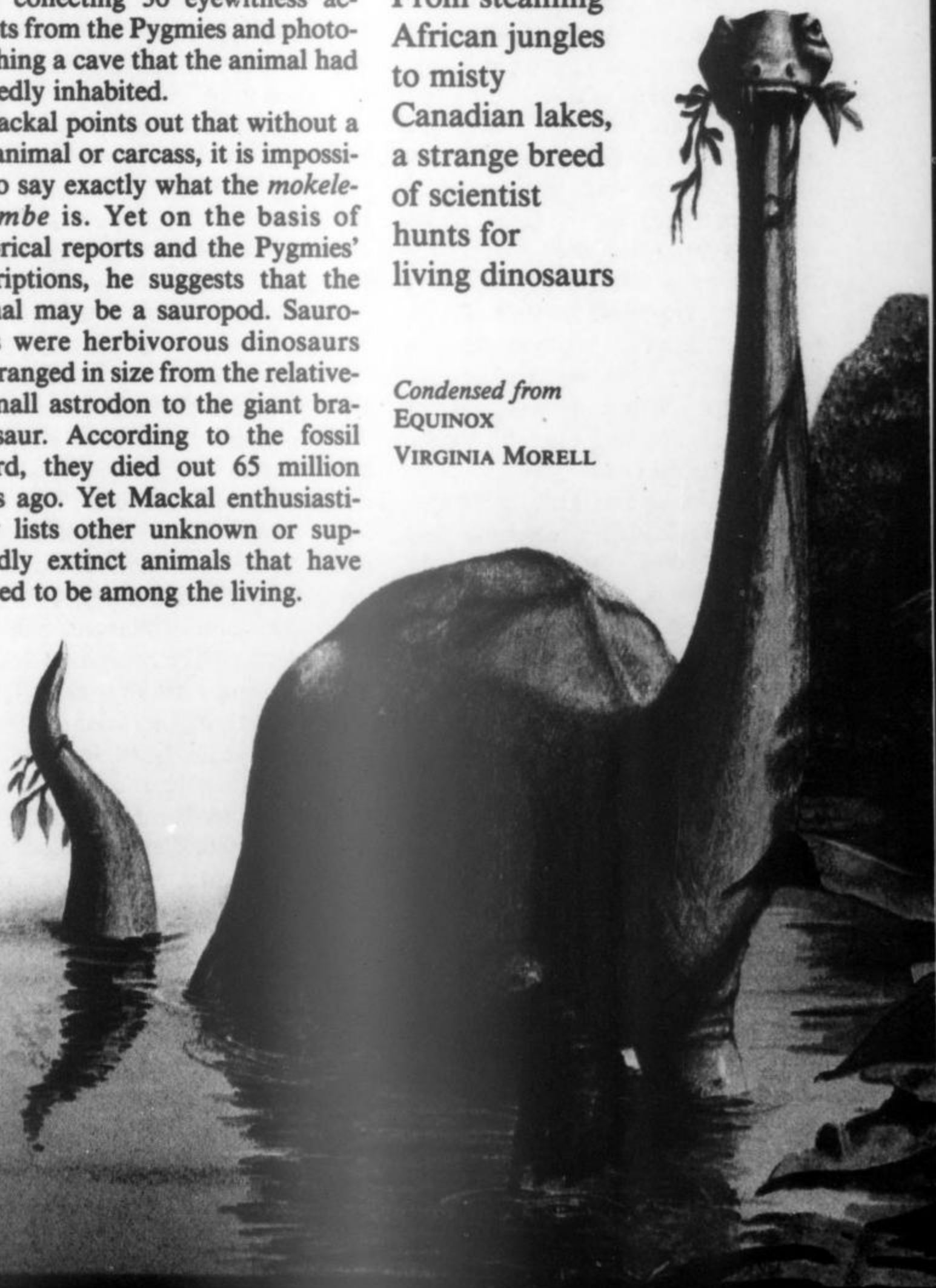
area, collecting 30 eyewitness accounts from the Pygmies and photographing a cave that the animal had allegedly inhabited.

Mackal points out that without a live animal or carcass, it is impossible to say exactly what the *mokele-mbembe* is. Yet on the basis of historical reports and the Pygmies' descriptions, he suggests that the animal may be a sauropod. Sauropods were herbivorous dinosaurs that ranged in size from the relatively small *astrodont* to the giant *brachiosaurus*. According to the fossil record, they died out 65 million years ago. Yet Mackal enthusiastically lists other unknown or supposedly extinct animals that have proved to be among the living.

From steaming African jungles to misty Canadian lakes, a strange breed of scientist hunts for living dinosaurs

Condensed from
EQUINOX

VIRGINIA MORELL



The African gorilla was long considered by scientists to be only another rumor until its discovery in 1855. And there is the okapi, a hoofed animal that resembles a cross between a giraffe and an antelope. Its home is not far from Mackal's search area, across the Congo River in Zaire. But for nearly 100 years scientists refuted reports of okapi sightings, basing their arguments on a fossil record that indicated the animal had been extinct for 20 million years. Finally, a living okapi was captured in 1906. Other finds include a blue pig discovered in the Congo in 1944, and the famous coelacanth, a fish supposedly extinct for 65 million years, that still swims off the African coast.

Mackal's eyes light up at the thought of adding a dinosaur to this list. "If a living one were discovered," he says, "it would be the greatest thing that ever happened to zoology. Think of it! A dinosaur surviving — this doesn't hurt zoology, it stimulates it!"

Within the Pale. Mackal has been stimulating zoology for the past 20 years. For ten years, he was scientific director of the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau. He has also participated in expeditions to Lake Champlain in northern New York and to British Columbia's Lake Okanagan. He has collected thousands of reports on mysterious animals around the world and published his findings in a book, *Searching for Hidden Animals*.

Although cryptozoology is not

fully accepted as a scientific discipline, its supporters are fighting hard for its recognition. In January 1982 Mackal and 14 other scientists formed the International Society of Cryptozoology, of which he is vice president and Bernard Heuvelmans, a French zoologist, the president.

They have many mysteries to solve: Loch Ness; "sea serpent" sightings off British Columbia; giant octopuses in the Bahamas; "monsters" in northern lakes in British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec; and continual reports of the sasquatch, a hairy hominoid said to inhabit the thick forests of British Columbia and the U.S. Northwest.

Even among scientists who have no intention of joining the society, there is some good will. "There are many things that we do not know or understand," says Dale Russell, curator of fossil vertebrates at the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Ottawa. "The cryptozoologists are venturing into an area that has been suspect in the scientific community for years. But I don't think it is outside the pale of science."

In *The Lost World*, the madly obsessed Professor Challenger, scorned by his colleagues, sets off for South America in pursuit of dinosaurs. Eventually he stumbles onto a jungle filled with the great reptiles. Some scientists say Mackal sees himself as another Challenger. A mild-mannered man of 57, he now occupies administrative and research posts at the University of Chicago, where for 20 years he was

a professor of biochemistry. He is tall and fit, with an explorer's fervor in his gap-toothed smile and glinting blue eyes. But his carefree smile can quickly turn to a steely look of determination at the mention of people who would discredit his work. He would love nothing more than to prove them wrong. "I am a scientist too," he says, "but that doesn't mean I can't have romance in my soul."

"I Know What I Saw." For Mackal, the two strands of romance and science converged while he was vacationing in Scotland in 1965 and met David James, founder of the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau. James showed him photos and films of sightings of the elusive "monster." Mackal was impressed and excited. "We teamed up," he says, "and I became the scientific director. At the time, I had the typically arrogant attitude that, with American technology, I'd solve the problem the next summer."

As it turned out, Mackal spent the next ten summers fidgeting with one technological mechanism after another. Sonar soundings produced the most hopeful results. They picked up rapid movements of large objects underwater, objects that behaved remarkably like animals swimming and diving. On one occasion in 1970, Mackal was sure he saw one of the animals. The experience still makes him tremble.

"I was sitting in the bow of our boat. First the water boiled up; then the creature's back began to rise,

showing a length of two metres out of the water, rolling, twisting. I have some film, but it doesn't show much. To this day, when someone asks me, 'Do you believe there is a monster in Loch Ness?' my stomach does a somersault. I know what I saw."

While at Loch Ness, Mackal corresponded with Paul LeBlond, an oceanographer at the University of British Columbia, who had put together a monograph of "sea serpent" sightings along the Pacific Coast. Mackal theorizes that these legendary serpents are a primitive whale known as a zeuglodon.

"Zeuglodon were up to 20 metres in length and they moved with a perpendicular motion," he says. "I think they may still be there, following the salmon runs from the ocean up freshwater rivers into the lakes. If you look at a map of Canada, you'll see that much of it is a network of interconnecting lakes and rivers. If we plot the location of sightings on these lakes and rivers, there is a coherent pattern."

In Mackal's eyes, the pattern is a series of several routes that account for the hundreds of reported sightings: the Columbia River to Lake Okanagan, the Fraser to Lake Harrison, the South Saskatchewan to Lakes Manitoba and Dauphin, and the St. Lawrence to Aylmer, Simcoe and Muskrat Lakes.

He would like to catch one of these creatures as it swims into a river. He suggests stringing two nylon nets across the river after the creature is sighted. One net would be

placed at the scene of the sighting, the other several kilometres upstream. Slowly, the nets would be brought together and the animal would be inside.

"Come, Then, Pretty." In the end, getting the animal is what cryptozoology is all about. It is what all the expeditions long for: the chance to be first to bring back "Nessie" or a *mokele-mbembe*. It is why Mackal returned to the Congo in November 1981.

Although the *mokele-mbembe* has, for the moment, eluded him, he is already compiling reports of what he calls other "maybe monsters" that lurk in the depths of the Congo. One is described by the Pygmies as having "planks growing out of its back." Says Mackal delightedly, "Now isn't that a perfect description of a stegosaurus?" There are also reports of an animal similar to the *mokele-mbembe*, but with a horn on its forehead. "Maybe an aquatic rhinoceros," speculates Mackal. "There are some in the fossil record."

Science, though, remains a demanding taskmaster, and the majority of paleontologists are cautiously skeptical of Mackal's dream. "I wouldn't mind if he actually chased an ancient monster up," says Philip

Currie, assistant director of research at the Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology in Drumheller, Alta. "Anyone who has ever studied dinosaurs has dreamed of this at one time or another. But 65 million years ago, dinosaurs disappeared from the fossil record. Nothing tangible has been found to indicate that any survived beyond that time."

Mackal's defense rests on his collected reports: People are seeing something out there. What is it?

In *The Lost World*, Professor Challenger comes back from South America to confront his enemies in the scientific community. He presents his findings at a symposium in London and, at the end of his lecture, amid jeers, produces a solid bit of evidence.

"Come, then, pretty," says Challenger. And then, with a laugh, he releases a giant pterodactyl — with huge soaring wings, glinting red eyes and sharklike teeth — against the audience.

It is one of Mackal's favorite images. "While I do enjoy the controversy, there are times when I'd like nothing more than to release a live pterodactyl against *my* enemies." Then a wicked just-dare-me smile crosses his face.

Gab Fest

JOURNALIST Franklin P. Adams once listened patiently as a friend told a story that never seemed to come to an end. At length, the fellow drew near the finish.

"Well," said the friend, "to make a long story short —"

"Too late!" Adams cried.

— Howard Teichmann, *George S. Kaufman* (Atheneum)